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ABSTRACT

Providing the early childhood (EC) community with a timely, actionable information about the Illinois State Board of Education's early learning initiative, "Little Prints" is a newsletter highlighting best practices among EC programs, representing the interests of and issues of EC professionals engaged in the education and care of children from birth to age 8, and working with other EC publications to inform the broader EC community of the links that bind individual programs into an essential continuum of EC services. This document consists of the first three issues of the newsletter, covering the year 2001. Issue 1 introduces the newsletter, highlights the work of an Alabama early childhood researcher working to create a multistate technical assistance program that would share resources across many Southern states, and describes an early childhood best practices site. Focusing on program quality, the second issue features case studies of two exemplary programs, describes the NAEYC accreditation process, highlights family resource center services in a rural county, and points out the gap between what early childhood development research says children need and what is actually offered in preschool settings. The third issue focuses on voluntary, universal preschool, noting that the trend is gaining momentum nationally, and featuring three case studies of pioneering universal preschool programs in other states. This issue also highlights Chicago's move toward universal preschool within the public school system, and details findings from a longitudinal study indicating that preschool cuts crime and dropout rates and boosts academic achievement. (HTH)

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Illinois State Board of Education

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Volume 1/Issue 1

A publication of the Illinois State Board of Education : Early Childhood Education

Little Prints

Stitching Together a Broad EC Program from Many Common Threads

Welcome to our very first issue of Little Prints, the Early Childhood education publication of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

Little Prints is about children and about the people and programs that have been brought together to serve them under the Early Childhood Education (EC) umbrella for the 2000-2001 academic year.

The goal of *Little Prints* is to provide the EC community with a continuing flow of timely, actionable information about the ISBE early learning initiative and how early education and care professionals lay an effective foundation for every public school child's growth and development.

As part of this initiative, the ISBE has developed draft Illinois Early Learning Standards. Before these standards are finalized, they will be reviewed and critiqued by focus groups and EC professionals throughout the state. As always, your feedback is encouraged and welcomed.

The role of *Little Prints* in this statewide EC development process is simple.

First, *Little Prints* will seek out best practices among EC programs and bring them to you with clear, focused articles that identify the links that each individual program has with others in the chain of EC initiatives.

Second, *Little Prints* will represent the interests and issues of EC professionals who are engaged in the education and care of children from birth to age eight. By covering the entire spectrum of activity, Little Prints hopes to bring together practitioners and programs for a more effective use of resources and a creative sharing of ideas.

Third, *Little Prints* will build on the work of other EC publications, including the many fine newsletters published by the STARnet regions and our experience with our previous publication, *Early Childhood News and Notes*. The key to our success will be how well we help the broader EC community understand the links that bind our individual programs and approaches into an essential continuum of services for young children and their families. Every teacher, administrator and service provider has a

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particular area of concern that invariably overlays with those who interact with children at different stages of their development. EC is in reality a very complex patchwork of programs that we now are stitching into a quilt. Each patch, colorful in its own right, is also essential to make our quilt an instrument that covers the needs of every child.

So, in this first issue of *Little Prints* we focus on themes of information sharing and service delivery efficiency. Dr. Glenn W. McGee, the state superintendent of education, talks about the importance of the new ISBE initiative. We talk with Dr. Craig Ramey, whose research in early childhood education has influenced the entire nation. We also review an EC best practices site in Naperville.

Please direct comments about Little Prints to Kay Henderson, Division Administrator, Early Childhood Education, Illinois State Board of Education

Early Learning Is Top Initiative

This is one of the most important years ever contemplated by the Illinois State Board of Education. I believe this because of the effects that its top-priority strategic plan called the "Early Learning Initiative" is bound to have on all of us.

The basic belief of the ISBE is "that the educational development and success of all Illinois children can be significantly enhanced when children participate in early childhood programs and services."

Recently, the state board backed up those words by allocating additional resources to bolster early childhood academic and family services programs. Our intent is to do whatever else it takes to bring all children under ISBE responsibility up to grade level by the time they reach eight years of age.

There are several ways the ISBE hopes to do this. For example, early childhood programs are going to evidence more childhood learning research and less adult categorical guesswork. They're going to make sense, they're going to be available for all at-risk children, and they're going to be supported all day—both as kindergarten and pre-kindergarten programs.

Early childhood professionals are going to collaborate more fully with the young child's family, with that family's social services providers and with all those providers' available resources.

This means, for example, that EC professionals will be able to help parents be better parents of small children deemed at risk of future academic failure. This also means that family programs providing before- and after-school services will be able to help these children, beginning at a much earlier age.

The ISBE has now recognized that if we wait until kindergarten to provide these services, we have waited too long!

In more practical terms, the new Early Learning Initiative helps stabilize and expand the current EC block grant programs by striving to eliminate waiting lists and providing better support—including serving three-year-olds and making available full-day, full-year services.

Another thing the new initiative does is establish standards, such as smaller class sizes, and better programs that include child development in all areas – mental, physical, social, and emotional. In other words, what we're trying to do is pull together programs that take place beyond the school's walls and within the actual communities where these children live.

Through this initiative we hope to create a system of early learning and support that will enable all children to achieve academic success by the end of the third grade. Furthermore, there is a research component that follows students far beyond grade three to provide feedback about how well the initiative prepared them for those later years, and what else might be done to improve these early learning programs beforehand.

As educational administrators, we have come to recognize that early childhood education has the potential to enable students to surmount their obstacles to learning in school and foster the kinds of healthy habits that will positively affect the quality of their lives later on. The birth-to-eight early learning initiative is indeed powerful, but it is only going to be as successful as EC professionals, local school officials, and other community care providers are willing to make it.

Your commitment and compassion will enable our children to excel and make Illinois second-to-none in terms of the quality of our schools and the quality of our lives.

Sincerely yours,

Glenn W. McGee
State Superintendent of Education

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Researcher Urges EC Emphasis

Value The Children!

Craig Ramey, Ph.D., is an Alabama researcher on a mission. He wants the early childhood professionals in all other states to crouch down and pay attention. He wants them to pay attention to the littlest people in their systems.

Young children are a valuable resource. Dr. Ramey's research points this out again and again. He is forever optimistic about how big people can become great people if they've experienced good programs as little people.

Early childhood programs have tremendous value, which is the message of his books as well as his recent research paper, co-written with his wife Sharon Landesman Ramey, entitled, "Alabama's Young Children: Can Their Future Be Brighter?"

Bright as these futures can be, Dr. Ramey also feels a need to rattle the statehouse doors to wake policy makers up to the dangers of fragmented services and lack of focus.

Dr. Craig Ramey is the author of two recent books, Right From Birth: Building Your Child's Foundation For Life and Going to School: How to Help Your Child Succeed, both published in 1999 by Goddard Press of New York.

"In many states," he says, "there is no effective coordinating mechanism or strong gubernatorial leadership, which leads to an uncoordinated system. In fact, it's not a system at all."

USE AVAILABLE RESOURCES MORE EFFICIENTLY

Dr. Ramey contends that in most states, available funding for early childhood programs is too widely dispersed to be as effective as it might be. The total amount of money allocated for these vital programs is one issue, but another, he says, is finding the leadership necessary to consolidate resources, coordinate their use and add efficiency to overall program administration.

The professor of psychology, pediatrics, neurobiology, and founding director of the Civitan International Research Center at the University of Alabama at Birmingham foresees a much better system. He believes, for example, that high technology, appropriately used, can make programs and services highly efficient.

Seven Principles of Effective Early Intervention

(Related to educating from birth and adapted from a 1992 study by Ramey and Ramey)

Timing	Intensity	Direct Provision of Learning Experiences
Interventions beginning earlier and continuing longer show significantly greater benefits than do those beginning later and concluding sooner. In particular, programs that begin in the first three years of life produce the greatest benefits.	Programs that are more intensive (number of home visits per week, number of hours per day, regularity of parental involvement, etc.) show more positive results and greater benefits than do less intensive interventions.	Children receiving interventions that provide direct educational experiences show greater and more lasting benefits than do children in programs that rely on intermediary routes to change children's competencies.

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"Technology," he says, "could be used to communicate and share information, as well as deliver and track the services being delivered, and that process can lay the groundwork for better evaluation strategies. For example, a sophisticated network could mean that a person working for Head Start could find out what other services the child and family are receiving."

But, of course, there can always be problems.

"One potential sticking point to this scenario," cautions Dr. Ramey, "would be the need for families to give their consent for information to be shared. But families get tired of giving the same information to every agency. Certainly, there is an issue of confidentiality that needs to be examined, but many families are more than willing to give permission to have their information shared," he says.

WANTED: ONE VAST COORDINATOR

Dr. Ramey is working to create a multistate technical assistance program that would share resources—not family information—across many Southern states. He says this would pool knowledge from areas such as government, finance, education, and research.

Right now, for example, there is no coordinated sharing of information even for state school boards.

"There are lots of places to go for information, such as Web sites," he says, "but I envision the creation of new ways to move knowledge into practice, creating programs that will be both effective and efficient."

Here's something he says that educators can do right now: educate the public. People need to know there's a base of research and scientific knowledge that has practical use. Dr. Ramey's books are designed to that end—get this information out to the public, and especially into the hands of parents. Several states have already "adopted" his books and sent them to policy makers, school boards, and principals in order to get everyone on the same page concerning program options.

"I believe that if we can be serious about addressing it well," Dr. Ramey says, "this knowledge base will go a long way in helping educators decide how to tailor programs to meet different family needs."

He envisions utilizing this knowledge base being coordinated in such a way that allows case managers or family coordinators, for example, to pull from a potential matrix of services, thus making individual plans more effective and efficient. One can easily imagine a typical case in which three or more agencies have independent contacts with families that have significant needs.

"If efforts are not coordinated," says Dr. Ramey, "the family will certainly be confused by all these different people and the services are not likely to be sufficiently delivered. There are big efficiencies that can be wrung out of the system. But with proper coordination, these efficiencies can also be plowed back into serving more people or in reducing overall budgets."

"It isn't always a matter of doing more and more," he says. "It's a matter of doing what you have to, the easiest way you know how."

Program Breadth and Flexibility	Individual Differences in Program Benefits	Ecological Dominion and Environmental Maintenance of Development	Cultural Appropriateness
Interventions providing more comprehensive services are more likely to have greater and more lasting effects than interventions narrower in focus.	Some children show greater benefit from early interventions than do other children. These differences appear to be related to each child's initial risk condition: the higher the risk, the greater the benefit	Over time, the positive effects of early interventions will diminish if there are not adequate environmental supports to maintain the child's positive attitudes and behavior.	Interventions must recognize and build appropriately on a family's cultural beliefs, traditions, and practices.

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Prairie Children Preschool:

An Early Childhood "Best

"Mom, can Erin come to my birthday party?"

"Of course, dear," said the child's mother.

"All right!" the little boy exclaimed. "I'm gonna tell her right away!"

For weeks now, her son had come home every day talking about his new friend, a girl named Erin. They were both Illinois tikes who went every day to Prairie Children Preschool in Naperville's Indian Prairie School District #204.

The mother just naturally assumed his friend had no special needs. Certainly, her little son never gave any reason to think differently. The way her boy described Erin, no adult on earth would think differently.

So now, imagine the party a few weeks later. In comes Erin. She uses a wheelchair, and, unable to speak, she communicates differently with a computer.

But to her newfound friend, the birthday boy, Erin is as fine a companion as there ever could be.

NO SUCH THING AS A DISABILITY

Just imagine what an attitude like this could do to knock out prejudice in general. If Erin and her buddy ruled the world, there would probably be no such term as "disabled."

"The mother had no idea," says Karen Sullivan, early childhood supervisor at the Prairie Children Preschool. "Her little boy had never once mentioned anything 'different' about his friend, and his mother was thrilled by this."

"But," Sullivan adds, "the incident was important for Erin as well. We know so much more about what she can do, because she has been in with other kids. We learned things about what she was aware of in her environment that we never would have known otherwise."

The supervisor concludes,"I think a lot of people would have taken one look at Erin and said that she needs to be in a self-contained class for children with special needs. It would have been very easy to say that, but she does some great things with computers and can communicate that way. So, it's been an important experience."

ALL CHILDREN BELONG TOGETHER

Prairie Children Preschool has been operating in Naperville for more than four years now, and it's one of the largest public school district preschools in the state. Scattered around this little Prairie are 24 classrooms, 600 children, and 125 staff members.

Karen Sullivan notes that, before her school opened, including children with disabilities at community preschools was starting to happen—slowly—but Naperville's booming growth didn't let anyone keep up with the program.

"Either the programs weren't out there," she says, "or their quality was not adequate for us to place students."

Practices Site"

Prairie Preschool is founded on solid philosophy based on even more solid research. All of it shows that children learn best from their peers. And when they have good peer models, they learn even better. Sullivan truly believes that, for the vast majority of children with disabilities, segregation is not the answer.

"They don't get the socialization skills," she says, "and they are not part of the school community."

A SCHOOL BOARD WISE BEYOND YEARS

Obviously nothing works in a public school district unless the school board wants it to. Supervisor Sullivan says that not only did her board want a high-quality preschool experience for all its children, but it also wanted to create opportunities for those with special needs.

Right now the preschool's model is 15 children per classroom – 10 regular tuition kids and five premium (meaning those with special needs). But these truly exceptional children are mixed right in with all the others at the school.

The board also insists that teachers have dual certification in both early childhood teaching and special education. They are also to be supported by two teacher's aides, as well as a speech/language pathologist, an occupational therapist, and a physical therapist.

Technology rules here, too. Not only are there enough computers for all the children, but there is also easy access to a helpful technology team providing communication boards, all kinds of switches, and a prairie full of voice output devices.

And the parents in their PTA—one of the few in the state for preschools—are also very active. They offer family events and parent education opportunities at least once a month. Sometimes, for the special needs population, specific programs are offered on behavior or topics like communication development or speech and language disorders.

"We try to target our whole population. We offer general topics relating to typically developing preschoolers, but we also look at things that are of interest to parents of children with special needs," Sullivan says. "All this just fits into our broader philosophy of truly integrating these students. We have case after case here where it is successful. It's a lot of work but it's well worth the effort."

"And," she adds, "it's most rewarding when you see the results in the kids."

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Volume 1/Issue 2

A publication of the Illinois State Board of Education: Early Childhood Education

Little Prints

A Continuous Focus on Quality

A continuing debate over the years has been how to define quality in early childhood education programs. With this issue of Little Prints, we provide anecdotal and research-based information to help analyze that question.

We offer case studies of exemplary programs in Harvey, Chicago and Hamilton County as examples of how educators and their communities have addressed early childhood needs. I think you will find them interesting and heartening.

We also provide a review of an important new study from the National Research Council called "Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers." Prepared by the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy – which was chaired by Barbara Bowman, president of Chicago's Erikson Institute – the study examined current research to determine what we now know with certainty about those environments that encourage the social, emotional, physical and cognitive development of young children. I believe every preschool caregiver and educator should review the report.

I'm particularly interested in the committee's findings about the important components of quality preschool programs. Here's a brief summary:

- Cognitive, social-emotional and motor development are treated as complementary, mutually supportive areas of growth requiring active attention in preschool years. The committee notes that social skills and physical dexterity influence cognitive development, "just as cognition plays a role in children's social understanding and motor competence."
- Responsive interpersonal relationships with teachers are encouraged and provided.
- Both class size and adult-child ratios are carefully determined to provide for more extensive teacher-child interaction and less restrictive or controlling teacher behavior.

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- Curriculum aims are specified and integrated across all activities. The committee found that no single curriculum or pedagogical approach can be considered the "best." But it found that centers that use a well-planned curriculum do a better job of preparing children to master formal schooling. This is especially important for young children who are at greater risk of academic failure.
- Better programs employ teachers who have had formal early childhood education and training.
- Effective programs encourage teachers to reflect on best practices and to revise programs based on the responsiveness of children to classroom activities.

These observations may strike some readers as simply common sense. You may disagree with some of these conclusions based on your own experience, or achieve outstanding results by taking a differing approach. But I believe the basic message is clear. Programs that employ strong and well-trained teachers, operate under a well-understood yet flexible curriculum and provide ample opportunity to develop teacher-child relationships do better for children than programs that don't.

Best regards,

Kay

Kay Henderson

Please direct comments about *Little Prints* to:
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CASE STUDY: Harvey

Guiding Children Through Research, Concern and Family Involvement

Twice a day, four days a week, three- and four-year-olds pour off buses and scamper into the Harvey School District 152 Prekindergarten Center. Quickly they stow coats in lockers and get into lines. Animated and eager, each group walks with a teacher through immaculate, student art-filled hallways into brightly decorated, well-appointed classrooms. For the next two-and-a-half hours, they are engaged and responsive. They are *learning*.

It could be a snapshot from any prosperous community, but it's not. In this southern Chicago suburb, 98.7% of the population lives below the poverty level. Of the 330 preschool students served by School District 152, 95% are eligible for free or reduced-price lunches, and 90% live with only one parent or someone other than a biological parent. About 85% are African-American, 14% are Hispanic and 1% are Caucasian. Bereft of the tax-generating industry that once made Harvey a boomtown, district funding relies heavily on grants.

"When you have this situation, you have to work extra hard, but you don't say 'We can't,'" says Superintendent Lela Bridges. "You say, 'We can.' You set high standards and you find the money, you find the determination and you find the energy."

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Those standards were recognized in June 2000 when the Harvey prekindergarten program, which began in 1988, received NAEYC accreditation. Here's what the program looks like today:

Riley Prekindergarten Center houses eight classrooms. One additional classroom is located nearby at Lowell-Longfellow School, and another is part of the District childcare center, which serves 80 children. A small birth-to-three program is home based. Total staff includes a director, a secretary, 10 teachers, 10 aides, an inclusion facilitator, a bilingual parent outreach staff member, and a part-time social worker.

A PROGRAM BASED ON RESEARCH

"Everything we do is based on research and is the result of a great deal of reflection on what the children in this community need at this particular time," says Linda Jones, prekindergarten program director. "Every issue is investigated by one of three staff self-study groups, then brought to the entire staff for discussion before a decision is made."

The highly detailed curriculum is an example. Currently filling seven thick binders, it continually evolves. Self-study groups wrestle with which thematic units, books and experiences have the most potential to immediately improve the lives of the children, and which will contribute most to their future academic and socio-emotional competence.

"You won't see a unit on bears because bears go nowhere," says Jones. "But you'll see a unit on health and nutrition because that can go somewhere. You can talk about the digestive system, the importance of healthy eating habits and exercise, the difference between junk food and nutritious foods...you set up healthy lifestyles. It's a topic that is worth kids' time."

An all-staff study group resulted in a marked reduction of discipline problems. Together they read Ross Greene's "The Explosive Child," a chapter every other week, and spent a great deal of time discussing as a group which behaviors to support, which to let go, which to try to negotiate, and ways to handle problems. The result: happier staff, happier children and happier families.

AN INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENT

Children receiving Special Education services due to disabilities or delayed development are included in regular classrooms, two or three per class. Anne Stole, inclusion facilitator/case manager and resource teacher, ensures that these children receive the accommodations they need and that the objectives prescribed by each child's Individualized Educational Plan are carried out. It's hands-on work that includes securing referrals from physicians for needed speech, occupational and physical therapy, creating toilet training plans, and home visits and family education, usually with a social worker or bilingual outreach person. When a child has a problem in the classroom, Stole works with teachers to find a way to meet the child's needs.

"The full-inclusion model is the best model for educating children," says Stole. "To achieve it, we've assembled a close-knit team that includes families, therapists, myself, a social worker, classroom teachers, teacher assistants and aides to students. It's a real partnership."

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Creating an Idyllic Place to Play and Learn

A few years ago, Linda Jones, director of the Harvey prekindergarten program, attended an ISBE-sponsored inservice on creating outdoor play space. For Jones, who was pursuing funds for playground equipment, it was a revelation. Here's a sampling of what she heard:

"It's upsetting when a district is given money for a playground and they plunk a big, hulking piece of equipment in a sun-baked lot and ask the kids to play with it. Think about the best times you had outdoors as a child. They seldom involved a piece of playground equipment."

Inspired, Jones persuaded some of the playground design speakers to drive to Harvey with her that night, in a driving rainstorm, to see the space and pick their brains.

Says Jones: "I showed the designer the space I was thinking about for the playground and he said, 'Do you have to put it here? That area right next to the school is beautiful, and there are trees – it's probably the most perfect setting I've ever seen."

As they talked, a vision took shape. Turning it into reality was the challenge.

"Linda Jones was determined to create an outdoor education facility," says Harvey Superintendent Lela Bridges. "She persuaded the designer to draw up a design – at a reduced fee – so we had something visual to help us with pursuing funds. The playground was her vision, but she painted it in such a way that it became our vision and then our mission."

FINDING FUNDING

Funds were secured in bits and pieces. Some prekindergarten funds were employed. Funds also were secured from the district, the teacher's union, the district's foundation and private contributors. To give back to the community, local businesses were hired for such tasks as excavation, pouring cement, landscaping, fencing and lighting.

"Linda was there watching every detail during the summer the playground was being built," says Bridges. "One time I even saw her out there watering the plants."

THE SUMMER'S END SURPRISE

When school let out in June 1999, there were large trees and grass alongside the school. When the children came back in September, they stood excitedly at the windows chanting, "Let's go to the park! Let's go to the park!" This is what they saw:

A concrete ramp, which facilitates tricycle transfer and provides wheelchair accessibility, leads from the front door to the playground. Concrete walkways and asphalt tricycle and wheelchair paths wind through lavish landscaping that includes lawn areas, large and small trees, shrubs and flowers. A sandbox and an imaginative-play house are being added, and cycle paths will soon boast a center stripe and stop signs. A colorful, multi-featured piece of play equipment that serves as both a physical and imaginative play center, beckons.

"The playground provides a wonderful space for children to socially interact in a less structured situation," says Jones. "Too often, in an effort to protect them, schools structure kids so tightly that they don't have the opportunity to develop in that way. When they take off running across the lawn, the impulse is to say, 'Stop! It's dangerous!' but you have to give the kids that opportunity. You have to support them and challenge them and give them the opportunity to be autonomous and self directed."

"The playground is like another classroom," says Eric Magnuson, early childhood consultant for the Illinois State Board of Education. "It was designed to meet the developmentally appropriate needs of the children and provide plenty of opportunities for practicing gross motor, fine motor and social skills. All of the flowers, trees and shrubs stimulate the senses and provide a great opportunity to extend science and other lessons out of doors. It enhances classroom learning."

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A SPIRIT OF COLLABORATION AND SELF-HELP

Collaboration with outside agencies enriches the entire program. A few examples:

- Head Start and the prekindergarten program serve similar populations and work together. A child might attend prekindergarten in the morning and Head Start in the afternoon, and Head Start children with special needs will receive services and evaluations through the district.
- Through an optometrist in Harvey, Medicaid-eligible children receive free eye exams and glasses.
- Through Ingalls Hospital, the staff receives inservice training on health-related topics.

"I believe that as a district we have to do everything we can to help ourselves," says Superintendent Bridges. That's why, in 1996, Bridges initiated the District 152 Education Foundation, Inc., a nonprofit organization whose board members – local business leaders – have raised $100,000 to date. Funds are used to enrich curricular programs, projects and staff effectiveness, and to encourage greater family/community involvement and investment in the district. Teachers may write to the Foundation for grants to fund special projects.

FAMILY INVOLVEMENT

Wednesday is staff development and Family Focus Day, a day for home visits and one-on-one communication. It also provides time for the self-study groups to work and time to screen children for the program.

"I don't see 'family involvement' as meaning only parents as classroom helpers," says Jones. "There should be a menu of activities for parent participation. Family involvement at its best is when we are jointly working for the welfare of the child. Families have really guided what we do."

Families critiqued the curriculum and said they wanted a unit on safety. It was added. They critiqued plans for the childcare center playground and suggested a vegetable garden, and it was added. They reviewed the parent handbook and said it was filled with "educator-ese." They helped revise it. Annual family evaluations also provide input.

"We say that parents are the first and most important teachers," says Jones. "If that's true, then our first job is to listen. I sometimes see my role as advocating for parents who can't always articulate what they want."

EASING THE WAY TO KINDERGARTEN

"I wish more children could attend the prekindergarten program," says Kathy Guajardo, Early Prevention of School Failure teacher-leader. "When we screen children in September, those that don't attend pre-K can be developmentally up to a couple of years behind. The children who do attend are more prepared for reading and math and have better social skills. In many cases they are able to write their names and recognize letters, and their attendance is better. And, importantly, their parents have a better understanding of their roles regarding school participation and preparation." ()

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Linda Jones: A Career-long Quest for What's Best for Children

For 33 years, Linda Jones, Ph.D., director of special education, pupil personnel services and preschool programs for Harvey School District 152, has focused tenaciously on doing what's right for children. Everywhere she has served, Jones, who is retiring in June, has mobilized forces for change and initiated major new programs and innovations, all based on the latest research.

"Linda Jones is always searching for cutting-edge knowledge and practices," says Anne Stole, inclusion facilitator/case manager for the Harvey prekindergarten program. "She's a voracious reader, and she's continually bringing us ideas from the literature. We chuckle because she's always saying 'There's just been a study done on...'"

Says Jones: "Deming (W. Edwards Deming, the quality improvement guru) says experience teaches nothing without theory, and that really does inform everything I do. To me it means looking at critical elements in patterns that can be correlated with behavior and can be replicated. With theory, you're looking at a way to chart, in some purposeful way, where you're going to go. Otherwise, you're just going in circles."

Jones' quest was jump-started in 1969 by her first Illinois teaching assignment as a 5th grade teacher in Oak Forest. Some of the children were having great difficulty learning to read, so she took some courses to see what she could do about it. That led to an M.Ed. in reading and other learning disabilities and development and implementation of a literature-based "whole language" program – long before such programs became the fashion.

In the early '70s, as a learning disabilities resource teacher in Calumet City, Jones pioneered delivery of LD student services in the regular classroom at a time when other programs emphasized a pull-out model. It's now considered a best practice.

As coordinator of learning disabilities/behavioral disorders programs for Exceptional Children Have Opportunities (ECHO) in South Holland, Jones established LD/BD programs in 17 member districts. She also created a staff development program for 55 teachers and wrote a manual on how to establish best practices in learning disabilities while pursuing her Ph.D., majoring in school psychology with minors in administration and reading.

Harvey School District 152 recruited Jones as director of special education and pupil personnel services in 1975. After passage of the state school reform package in 1985, Jones wrote a grant proposal and, in 1988, launched a prekindergarten program, taking on its directorship in addition to her other duties. Shortly afterward, as secretary of the Burr Ridge school board, a position she still holds, Jones challenged that district to write a grant that enabled them to start a prekindergarten program.

Recognizing a great need among families in her district, Jones applied for yet another grant and spearheaded the transformation of office space into an additional prekindergarten classroom and a much-needed childcare center that opened in 1998.

"Our entire prekindergarten program is the result of Linda's vision and determination, which includes what she has accomplished and what she has been able to get others to accomplish," says Harvey Superintendent Lela Bridges. "She has high standards and simply does not believe that there are reasons why you cannot achieve those standards."

Says Jones: "I think that the forces of status quo and inertia – and ignorance of theory – are huge barriers to improvement in schools. I've learned that you just don't let those barriers stop you. It takes an enormous amount of work, but they can be overcome.

"When I walk up and down these hallways, I see that the children and families are welcomed and respected, the kids are challenged and supported, and they're engaged in learning that is meaningful. That sounds simple, but it's not. It's an all-consuming task. The fact that it happens here every day in every class makes me prouder than anything else I've done in my career."

NAEYC Accreditation:
A Commitment to Ongoing Excellence

Nationwide, more than 7,500 early childhood programs serving nearly 700,000 children have been awarded accreditation by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs, a division of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC). More than 8,000 programs are working toward that goal. Illinois has 394 NAEYC-accredited programs, and 471 more programs have begun the accreditation process.

"Accreditation is voluntary," says Pat Mucci, assistant director of program relations for NAEYC. "Programs go through the process because they truly want to demonstrate that they are meeting the highest standards of quality."

Over the past few years some states have linked funding to accreditation, with accredited programs receiving higher levels of reimbursement. That's because recent studies show that accredited programs consistently demonstrate higher quality – as defined by NAEYC – than nonaccredited programs.

WHO MAY APPLY

All types of public, private, profit and nonprofit early childhood programs may apply for accreditation, including nursery schools, preschools, kindergartens and before- and after-school programs. A program must have been in operation for at least a year and have at least two staff members serving at least 10 children. If the program serves infants, toddlers and school-age children, all program components must be included in the application.

THE ACCREDITATION PROCESS

Accreditation is a three-step process that includes self-study, validation and the accreditation decision.

"Before applying, I would direct interested programs to our website (www.naeyc.org) to do some research," says Mucci. "There's a wealth of information there, including a Readiness Survey designed to help early care and education professionals recognize when a program is ready to begin the self-study process."

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STEP ONE: SELF-STUDY

After completion of an application and payment of a fee of $125 to $300 plus, depending on enrollment, the program receives a self-study kit that includes a guide to accreditation, criteria and procedures, and the questionnaires that administrators, teachers and families must complete. All participants rate the program on the same criteria using the same scale to indicate whether criteria are "not met," "partially met" or "fully met."

Self-study is self-paced, and a program can take as long it needs to complete the process. The average is nine to 18 months.

"We spent two years in the self-study process," says Linda Jones, director of preschool programs for Harvey School District 152. "After one year, I asked our regional NAEYC representative to visit the program, and she pointed out things that had escaped us and areas where we needed work, especially in health and safety. We took another year to work on the suggestions and bring ourselves into full compliance in all areas, and it boosted us to another level."

When self-study is completed, programs submit to NAEYC a 102-page Program Description, an application for validation and a second fee of $300 to $1,000 plus, depending on enrollment.

"We strongly encourage programs not to apply for that step until they've made as many improvements as they possibly can," says Mucci.

STEP TWO: VALIDATION

A validator is a volunteer, usually the director of an accredited program who has been through the process, completed training and post-training activities and accompanied a team of experienced validators on a program visit. Validators must complete at least three validation visits per year and undergo re-training every three years. On site, validators verify the accuracy of the administrative criteria, and each observes three groups of children for one hour.

"It's an open book test," says Mucci. "The criteria and rating scales are the same that the program used for self-study. The validation team is simply an objective set of expert eyes that takes a snapshot of a typical day for the commissioners who will make the accreditation decision."

"Three validators came for a day that started at 8:00 and ended at 6:00 or 7:00," says Jones. "In any instances where the validators recorded non-compliance or perceived non-compliance with criteria, I had the opportunity to add my written comments to the report." Jones has since completed training and become a validator herself.

The Components of High Quality

As defined by the Academy, high quality involves approximately 100 criteria grouped into 10 areas:

- Teacher-child interaction
- Curriculum
- Communication with families
- Staff qualifications and professional development
- Staffing patterns
- Program administration
- Physical environment
- Health and safety
- Nutrition and foodservice
- Program evaluation

Many criteria within these areas are observable. Greatly simplified, this is what a high-quality program looks like: Children are comfortable, relaxed, happy and engaged in developmentally appropriate activities. A sufficient number of adults with specialized training in early childhood development and education are

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STEP THREE: ACCREDITATION DECISION

The self-study report and validation report are reviewed in Washington, D.C. by a commission of three to seven recognized experts in child care and early childhood education. Because of all the work leading up to this step, 88% of programs are granted accreditation.

"The commission's heaviest weighting is on the observable experience of the child," says Mucci. "For example, a program that may not have the strongest administrative component but provides an excellent experience from the child's perspective could earn accreditation, but the reverse would never happen."

Programs judged to be in substantial compliance are granted accreditation for three years. Almost all of those also receive recommendations for further improvement. If accreditation is not granted, programs have nine months to make required improvements, after which another validation team will visit.

Programs that do not maintain high compliance with accreditation criteria have their accreditation revoked. This happens fewer than 10 times a year.

IT'S AN ONGOING PROCESS

Accreditation is a process of continual assessment and ongoing improvement. Programs submit progress reports on the first anniversary of accreditation. On the second anniversary, they re-order self-study materials, and they spend the third year again immersed in self-study.

"One of the strengths of the accreditation process is that programs continuously evaluate themselves and work toward improving and providing the highest quality care within the limits they have," says Mucci. "For example, maybe an inner city school can't provide a playground. That doesn't mean that the program can never be accredited. We don't expect every program to look the same."

WHY PURSUE ACCREDITATION?

The process takes time and effort, but those who complete it think it's worth it.

"Our teachers wanted to go through the process because they think they're pretty good and I think they're pretty good, but that goes only so far," says Jones. "I think you're missing something if you don't validate what you think is good against the national standard." Since receiving accreditation, the program has received notice and congratulations from its congressman and the Illinois State Board of Education, and a visit from Governor Ryan.

"We believe all programs should move toward accreditation," says Judy Bertacchi, director of staff development and training for the Ounce of Prevention Fund, which operates several NAEYC accredited programs in Chicago. "Going through the process of accreditation makes it very clear that this is professional work and that there are standards to be followed. It lays out a basic framework for a program that operates with standards."

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involved with the children. The curriculum stresses all areas of a child's development – cognitive, social-emotional and physical – and is designed to help all children learn to learn. Toys, materials and adult expectations for children of differing ages and interests vary appropriately. Parents are welcome to observe, discuss policies, make suggestions and participate in the program, and the staff meets regularly to plan and evaluate the program.

The criteria within each area are clearly written in general terms. Here is just one example from the observable "Teacher-Child Interaction" area:

Accessible teachers – Children show no hesitation to approach teachers with questions, bids for affection and requests for help. Teachers liberally provide individual attention when they are asked or when it is needed. Teachers do not spend long periods of time talking to other teachers or involved in housekeeping chores that don't include children.

"The criteria came from the field," says Mucci. "They represent what early childhood educators all over the country thought best practice looked like and what they wanted as high-quality indicators."

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Educare Cen
An Island of

CASE STUDY: Chicago

In 1986, the Ounce of Prevention Fund, a nonprofit organization that combines public resources with private dollars to invest in the healthy development of children, adolescents and families, cobbled together funding and opened an experimental birth-to-five early intervention program called the "Beethoven Project."

Located on the second floor of a high-rise in the Robert Taylor Homes on Chicago's south side, it provided childcare, prekindergarten classes, family services and healthcare services to about 100 children each year for 15 years. Eventually, deteriorating conditions in a neighborhood plagued by drive-by shootings led to a new vision.

"We wanted a setting that was safe and that created an island of calm because children have to be able to play to learn, and they have to be able to play out of harm's way," says Harriet Meyer, Ounce's president. "We wanted a lot of light, because these children live in homes where doors are locked and shades are drawn for safety. And we wanted to create a quality, seamless birth-to-five program with a family support model."

In February 2000, the Ounce opened Educare Center, a $3.5 million building constructed across the street from the former site, on land donated by the Chicago Public Schools. Funding began with a $1 million commitment from philanthropist Irving B. Harris and rapidly extended to the Illinois Department of Human Services, Head Start, Early Head Start, and a host of corporate and private benefactors. All continue to provide funding.

A UNIQUE DESIGN

From the outside, the unconventional, multicolored, single-story building looks like a welcoming little village. Inside, 13 state-of-the-art classrooms, a family room, staff training center and offices wrap around a central outdoor courtyard. The large, open courtyard is divided into manageable play areas by the two indoor gymnasiums that extend into it. Classroom windows and windowed doors open onto the play area, amplifying the light that pours in from skylights.

Windows and windowed doors also connect contiguous infant, toddler and three-to-five classrooms, a layout designed to ease transitions as the children grow.

"Once children have transitioned to their new room, they can continue to see their previous teachers and classmates," says Meyer. "This helps them to feel secure during a time of change that can be difficult."

The center is open weekdays from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. except for two weeks' inservice training and staff development. This makes it possible for teen parents to stay in school and for other parents to move from welfare to work.

AN EARLY INTERVENTION FAMILY SUPPORT MODEL

"The Ounce is an early intervention, primary prevention agency, meaning we support families at critical times in their lives to prevent problems from occurring later on," says Judy Bertacchi, director of staff development and training. "Every child is assessed and followed closely to ensure that all areas of their development are progressing, including their ability to participate in and sustain relationships while reaching cognitive, physical and social-emotional milestones."

Each classroom has a certified teacher – many of whom have master's degrees in early childhood education – a teacher assistant and an aide. Low child-to-staff ratios (3:1 for infants and 6:1 for three-to-five year-olds) help build trusting relationships.

Each family has a family support worker who partners with them to achieve mutually agreed-upon goals, which are established in the early months of the program and incorporated into a written "family partnership agreement" that includes an action plan. The broad goals are the family's goals – for the child and for the family – and they always include a focus on the child's continuing development, such as "We will read more to Joshua at home" and "We will help Joshua learn to play better with other children."

To ensure that the low-income, 100% African-American families the Center currently serves have access to services they need, the family support component also provides parent groups, guidance and self-sufficiency, and adult education services through community partnerships.

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ter:
Calm in a Chaotic Urban Environment

Through collaboration with Cook County Hospital, the Ounce provides primary health care services at its new Hayes Center clinic a block from the Center.

"One day a week we hold a developmental clinic," says Bertacchi. "If we have a concern about a child, Cook County Hospital will bring in psychologists, behavioral pediatricians, speech, language and occupational therapy experts so we can have the child assessed very quickly, in their own neighborhood."

EMPHASIS ON PREPARATION FOR SCHOOL

One side of Educare Center has windows that face Farren Elementary School, the next stop for the five-year-olds in Educare's program. In preparation for that step, the Center's curriculum gives special emphasis to the language, literacy and social-emotional development that research pinpoints as critical to school success. It includes an arts program that involves children and families in activities inside and outside the classroom, infant mental health services and nutrition consultation. Extensive staff training is ongoing.

COLLABORATION WITH CHICAGO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Educare Center operates as a subcontracting unit of the Chicago Public Schools, which provides funds to merge the Center's full-day program with the state's prekindergarten program. The collaboration is part of a citywide CPS program to increase the availability of full-day, high quality childcare for working parents through existing licensed daycare centers. It's a step toward the universal full-day early childhood education toward which CPS would like to move but for which space is unavailable.

"We are trying to ensure continuity, quality and the delivery of consistent services in full-day preschool programs," says Christine Ryan, manager of the Early Childhood Subcontracting Program for CPS. "The subcontracting units with which we collaborate must be licensed and have certified teachers, which day care centers do not necessarily have. They must attend an information session during which we detail our selection criteria, and they must submit a proposal. If the proposal is accepted, the children become CPS students, which makes them eligible for a variety of screening and other specialized services that they might not otherwise be able to access. We also offer teachers professional development once a month."

Currently, the subcontracting program includes 179 classrooms serving 3,320 children throughout the city.

SHARING NATIONWIDE CHALLENGES

Educare Center needs two additional teachers to enable it to operate at capacity, which is 156 children. Says Bertacchi: "We are struggling, as is every program in America, to get the staff we need, especially at the birth-to-three level and master's degree level, with special certification and special coursework in Early Childhood."

Inquiries are welcome. Please call 312-922-3863 ext. 347.

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CASE STUDY: Hamilton County

Providing Big-City Services in a Resource-Starved Rural County

The humble patchwork that comprises the Hamilton County Community Unit District No. 10 preschool program in McLeansboro belies the wealth of educational opportunities inside. Two adjacent facilities – a flat-roofed farm building and a prefab – house the Preschool Center, which includes four prekindergarten classrooms, a Head Start classroom, a special education classroom, child care for children age six weeks to 12 years, and a multipurpose room. There, a director, five certified teachers, five aides and 10 childcare workers provide full-day prekindergarten classes and daycare to 100 birth-to-five children from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.

Steps away, a small house is home to the Family Resource Center, which provides centralized, conveniently located and otherwise unavailable services to about 1,000 families per year. Activities begin at 8:30 a.m. and may last until 9:00 p.m.

In the sparsely populated, 350 square mile rural county, a majority of the 99% Caucasian families farm. Industry is nonexistent, unemployment is high, per capita income is less than $16,000, and resources are scant.

PURSUING RESOURCES

"We spend a lot of time writing grants, and we collaborate with many, many agencies to provide the services our families need," says Penny Lee, director of preschool and special education services.

In addition to the funds the program receives from the state, grants come from such diverse sources as the Southern Illinois University School of Medicine and Wal-Mart. "When one source of funding dries up, we look elsewhere to enable us to continue and expand our services," says Lee.

For example, when funding for services to teen moms was cut, the Preschool Center applied to the Public Health Department and received a grant of $700 to continue prenatal/Lamaze classes. When a health services grant expired, the Center tapped SIU and the local hospital for nearly $7,000 to provide twice-a-month counseling services. A $600 Wal-Mart grant helps to fund a Kindermusik Camp, which fosters literacy among two- to five-year-olds through music activities. In response to the Center's requests, McDonald's provided take-home firefly toys for a Family Fun Night planned around author Eric Carle's books, including *The Very Lonely Firefly*, and Johnson & Johnson provided baby products for new-parent gift bags. A Partners in Education community group holds fundraisers to help provide supplies and items that grants don't cover, such as shoes for a needy youngster.

"If a child needs something, there's usually an agency out there somewhere that will provide it," says Janice Crow, Family Resource Center coordinator. "You just keep looking. You don't give up."

FAMILY RESOURCE CENTER SERVICES

Through their own staff resources and through multiple collaborations, the Family Resource Center provides a broad range of education choices. All are free. A small sampling:

- A parent training program fosters literacy through developmentally appropriate activities that range from providing a book to every child born in the county and teaching new parents the importance of reading, talking and singing to their children, to showing children and parents how to make their own books from readily available materials at the Center's monthly children's birthday parties.
- GED classes, provided by Rend Lake Community College, prepare individuals for the graduation test and teach computer and life skills.
- An Options for Mother and Baby program provides pre- and post-partum tutoring and support and teaches parenting skills to teens who are still in high school.
- A parent support group, sponsored by Child and Family Connections, focuses on preschoolers' development issues and parenting skills.

LOCAL AREA NETWORK SERVICE

As part of her job, Crow spends a day a month in meetings at the three-county LANS, which provides services for children at risk for removal from school, home or community, and removed children returning to a normal setting. One example of her participation:

A five-month-old who attends the Preschool Center was removed from home and placed in foster care by DCFS. The parents want the baby back. Crow helped them assemble a "family team" to create a plan that, when completed, will help to persuade DCFS to allow return of the child. Included are a representative from

Head Start, Child and Family Connections, a Preschool Center teacher, the parents' employers and extended family – and Crow herself, who coordinates activities and handles all paperwork. The plan tries to ensure that someone visits the home every weekday – whether it's the Head Start representative, the DCFS counselor or the extended family – to teach parenting skills and provide support. LANS approved the plan, and the team continues to work together toward the goal.

A RESULTS-PRODUCING PROGRAM, A CAN-DO SPIRIT

At the beginning of each year, teachers work with parents to set developmentally appropriate goals for each child. At an end-of-the-year conference, progress is assessed.

"More than 80% of our children achieve the goals that have been set for them," says Lee. "We are making a big impact."

Lee is quick to credit the can-do spirit and generosity of the Center's personnel.

"I have a wonderful staff that wants to continually evolve and adapt to the changing needs of our children and families and to find new and appropriate ways to work with them," she says. "The State Board of Education is in the process of developing early childhood learning standards, and they needed some teacher-volunteers to create developmentally appropriate experiences to support the standards. As always my staff was delighted to participate. They have heart, and that's what makes our Center click." ○

What we know in EC learning is not what we usually get

A comprehensive review of early childhood development research concludes that most prekindergarten settings are not helping young children to develop their emotional, physical and cognitive potential adequately, and many may actually be harmful.

The three-year study by the Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy, formed by the Commission on Behavioral and Social Sciences and Education of the National Research Council (NRC), says that early childhood teachers and caregivers often do not fully understand the extent to which preschool children can learn, nor their need to balance learning with reinforcing, positive relationships with their teacher, parents or guardian. The study, entitled "Eager to Learn: Educating our Preschoolers" can be found at www.nap.edu, or ordered from the National Academy Press on-line or by calling 800-624-6242.

"There is strong evidence that children, when they have accumulated substantial knowledge, have the ability to abstract well beyond what is ordinarily observed," says the report, which was published

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Barbara T. Bowman has been president of the Erikson Institute for Advanced Study in Child Development since 1994 and on the faculty since 1966. She began her professional career in 1950 on the faculty of the University of Chicago Laboratory School, spent several years as a teacher in Iran, and later served as head teacher for the Therapeutic Day Care Program of the Chicago Child Care Society.

Bowman has served on numerous boards, including that of the Great Books Foundation, the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards and Roosevelt University. She is a past president of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Her work has resulted in the publication of dozens of articles and studies in academic journals, and she is a frequent speaker at conferences nationwide.

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Eager to Learn Recommendations

The Committee on Early Childhood Pedagogy found that "what is now known about the potential of the early years, and of the promise of high-quality preschool programs to help realize that potential for all children, stands in stark contrast to practice in many – perhaps most – early childhood settings."

To close that gap, the committee issued 19 specific recommendations. By category, they include:

Professional development

- Each group of children in early childhood education should be assigned a teacher who has at least a bachelor's degree with specialized education related to early childhood.
- Teacher education programs should provide a stronger foundation of knowledge about the development of children's social and affective behavior, thinking and language.
- Teacher education should require information on the pedagogy of teaching preschool-aged children.
- Student teaching internships for preschool education should be more complete and rigorous.
- All childcare and early childhood education programs should have access to a qualified supervisor.
- State and federal organizations should learn more about the effective preparation of early childhood teachers.
- Demonstration schools for early childhood professional development should be established.

Educational Materials

- The federal education and human services departments, working with state counterparts, should develop, test and evaluate curricula consistent with current research.
- Federal agencies should invest in Internet and CD technologies that make it easier to disseminate examples of best practices to teachers and groups.

Policy

- All states should establish early childhood education program standards that recognize the diversity of young children and that adapt preschool, kindergarten and primary programs to their diverse needs.
- Content standards should be developed by states and school districts that ensure that children have access to rich and varied opportunities to learn in areas that are now omitted from many curricula, such as phonological awareness, number concepts, methods of scientific investigation, cultural knowledge and language.
- A single career ladder should be specified by each state for early childhood teachers.
- The federal government should fund well-planned, high-quality center-based preschool programs for all children at high risk of school failure.

The Public

- Groups concerned about how young children are educated should actively promote public understanding of early childhood education and care.
- Early childhood programs and centers should build alliances with parents to cultivate mutually reinforcing environments for young children at home and at the center.
- A broad empirical research program should be launched to examine the full range of factors that affect preschool learning.
- A new generation of research should be launched to examine more rigorously the characteristics of programs that produce beneficial outcomes for all children, with emphasis on programs and structures that are effective with children at high risk of educational difficulties.
- Research should be conducted on alternative ways to organize, regulate, support and finance early childhood programs.

The committee concludes: "...The case for a substantial investment in a high-quality system of child care and preschool on the basis of what is already known is persuasive. Moreover, the considerable lead by other developed countries in the provision of quality preschool programs suggests that it can, indeed, be done on a large scale."

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early this year. "Indeed, the striking feature of modern research is that it describes unexpected competencies in young children, key features of which appear to be universal."

But underscoring the need for a balanced approach, it also says: "Neither loving children nor teaching them is, in and of itself, sufficient for optimal development. Thinking and feeling work in tandem."

The multidisciplinary NRC committee was chaired by Barbara Bowman, president of the Erikson Institute of Chicago and one of the most knowledgeable and influential early learning and child development educators in the nation.

SEEKING EDUCATIONAL COMPETENCE

"Traditionally in early childhood education we have worried about helping children to become developmentally competent, so that they have learned the lessons available to be learned in their families and communities." Bowman says. "We have not worried unduly about helping them to become educationally competent. We just figured that if they were developmentally competent, then of course they could learn in school. Now we know that it is equally important for very young kids to have the opportunity to learn school-related knowledge and skills."

This places an even greater burden on teachers and caregivers of children at risk of academic failure, Bowman says.

"Children who grow up in environments where family and neighbors don't use large vocabularies and don't spend much time on literacy activities enter kindergarten without the advantage that almost all middle-class kids have, which is a preschool education with a heavy focus on literacy and number activities," says Bowman. "That is a real educational disadvantage because kindergarten is now a time when there is great pressure for children to master reading, writing and arithmetic."

A NEED FOR BETTER PLANNING

For preschool teachers and caregivers, this means better and more thoughtful planning and better assessment techniques, Bowman says. "It also means altering the curriculum to meet the needs of individual kids, rather than saying this is the curriculum we have, and if you can't learn, it's your fault," she says. "We did not find any curriculum that seemed to be of sufficient worth to want to recommend it for everybody. They work differentially with different children. A standard curriculum applied to all children is probably a mistake."

Other findings that Bowman considers of special note:

- The amount of schooling a preschool teacher has is an important indicator of that teacher's probable success. "We know that many preschool caregivers are young women, often without degrees," Bowman says. "We recommend that every child have access to a fully certified teacher because there's a strong correlation between years of education and doing the kinds of things that help children succeed in school."

- Studies indicate that up to 80% of childcare programs are of "less than good quality, and 40% to 50% are downright harmful," Bowman says. "Even middle-class kids who go to poor quality centers are in jeopardy."

- As important as a thoughtful curriculum is, it is just as important to have opportunities for interaction and relationships with adults. "One of the most important watershed events taking place in the first few years of life is establishment of a social relationship between the baby and important people in their environment," Bowman says. "Studies show that kids' relationship with their preschool teachers predicts next year's relationship with kindergarten teachers, and relationships with kindergarten teachers predict reading scores."

- More time must be allocated for individualized assessments of what each child knows, Bowman says. Most programs give teachers no time to plan, review and assess the impact of activities, or to evaluate individual child needs.

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- Learning standards can serve as important guideposts, but it is up to teachers to make them relevant within the range of interests of young children. "It's so easy to let teachers off the hook with regard to making important science, mathematics, and literary ideas clear to children because standards are expressed in such general terms," Bowman says. "It is important to be sure children really understand what is being taught and and that they are not just learning to label."

Bowman hopes that the study will help policy makers understand the need to devote more, and more expert, resources to early childhood education, including funding.

"We keep looking for the cheap and easy solution," she says. "That's the American way. But these are people problems, and they're going to be solved by people. And all the evidence we have is that we know how to fix the problems but it's going to cost money."

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Task Force Will Point the Way to Voluntary Universal Preschool

During the past several years, Illinois has become a leader among the states in its support for and understanding of early childhood education.

Total state funding for the prekindergarten program ranks among the top five nationwide, and the Illinois State Board of Education, continuing the commitment, has identified early childhood education as one of four priority areas for educational leadership.

That's not just an empty promise. As part of the ISBE commitment, we have consciously worked to provide a continuum of services so that children who are at risk of academic failure will have the support they need from birth to age 8. We've consolidated administration of previously separate but related early childhood activities. We've bolstered our technical assistance and professional development program for early learning staff members. We've strengthened collaboration with childcare and Head Start. And we've worked hard to establish standards for both early learning and program quality.

Now I'm pleased to report that Governor George Ryan, reflecting his personal focus on the well-being of Illinois children, has issued an executive order establishing a universal preschool task force. The group is charged with creating a five-year plan to provide voluntary early childhood education opportunities to all children aged 3 to 5 whose parents want such services. This is, clearly, a major step in the development of our early childhood education programs.

The Task Force on Universal Access to Preschool is chaired by First Lady Lura Lynn Ryan, who leads the governor's Futures for Kids initiative. Task force members represent a wide range of early childhood stakeholders, including caregivers, parents, teachers, legislators, state agency leaders, school administrators and others. It is to report to Governor Ryan by January 1, 2002.

I think it is worth considering for a moment the governor's rationale for launching such an initiative. In his executive order, he talks about core beliefs that have always guided our early childhood programs.

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These include:

- "Quality early education programs have a lasting impact on the health, education and well-being of Illinois children."
- "A strong family environment coupled with good-quality early education is the foundation for the development of a strong and productive work force in Illinois."
- "Research has demonstrated that children who receive two years of quality early educational programs have better short- and long-term outcomes related to school performance."
- "Parents' varied scheduling needs and preferences require a variety of prekindergarten options including part day, full day and full year."

With this as its baseline, the task force plans to gather information from parents, civic groups and others who serve young children to develop a series of voluntary universal preschool recommendations.

As a reader of *Little Prints*, you already understand the importance of high-quality early childhood education opportunities to the physical, social/emotional and cognitive development of young children. In this issue, we offer additional information about the concept of universal preschool as it is practiced or envisioned in other states. We also offer the insights of Anne Mitchell, a leading early childhood education researcher and practitioner since the mid-1980s.

During the coming months, I hope you will talk with the task force and me about your views of the theory and potential practice of universal preschool in Illinois. This is a wonderful opportunity to help shape a program of great significance to all of our children.

Best regards,

Kay Henderson

Kay Henderson

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Universal Preschool

Gains Momentum Nationwide

One of the leading U.S. experts on early childhood education says that a move towards universal preschool is among five major trends that characterize prekindergarten education today.

Anne Mitchell, president of Early Childhood Policy Research, an independent consulting firm, says in a March 2001 report that a key issue is how to define "universal" in the context of each state's history, resources, and family and child needs.

"We know that children who grow up in quality early learning environments do better in their academic careers," says Mitchell, who is widely published on early childhood education issues. "The issue is to define 'universal' preschool carefully so that existing programs have both the opportunity and resources to meet higher standards, and so that all sources of funds are blended to make sure that prekindergarten programs are not forced to replace one source of funds with another."

In her report, "Prekindergarten Programs in the States: Trends and Issues," Mitchell notes that the typical early childhood program of the 1980s focused on at-risk or very poor children who were four years old, most often with half-day sessions in a public school. Staff qualifications typically included elementary teacher certification, although often not with a specific early childhood component.

In the 1990s, Mitchell says, programs expanded to serve more three-year-olds and broadened eligibility to include children who had a variety of educational disadvantages, with poverty or family income only one factor. More programs began operating for a full school day.

By 2001, the report says, it has become common to find prekindergarten programs in community-based programs such as childcare centers, nursery schools and Head Start centers. Only seven states limit early childhood programs to public schools. On the other hand, quality controls and accountability have become greater concerns.

So far, only Georgia has committed state funding for universal preschool, open to all four-year-olds, regardless of income or other criteria. Other states have moved toward a universal preschool system, but so far have not provided adequate resources to achieve it (See case study, page 9).

Several obstacles face any state that moves to expand toward universal early childhood programs.

"First, they need to have a clear and well-developed program of studies, and we know that not every state has preschool standards," she says. "States must decide how universal they want their program to be. The more successful states take a broad view of what facilities should be included in early childhood education, and permit any organization that can meet set standards to deliver prekindergarten services.

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Anne Mitchell founded her consulting firm, Early Childhood Policy Research, in 1991 after many years as an educator, researcher and editor focused on early childhood issues. She was associate dean of education at Bank Street College of Education in New York City, where she founded a graduate program in Early Childhood leadership and co-directed the first national study of public schools as providers of programs for children under six.

She is the author or co-author of numerous articles, books and reports, among them the 1997 edition of "Financing Child Care in the United States: An Illustrative Catalog of Current Strategies," "Prekindergarten Programs Funded by the States: Essential Elements for Policymakers" (available at www.familiesandwork.org), and "Implementing Universal Prekindergarten in New York State: Blended Funding and Other Financial Considerations" (available at www.earlychildhoodfinance.org). She recently completed the second volume of "Financing Child Care" (available from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation at fplus@swbell.net).

Mitchell is a member of the Greenville, New York, Board of Education, and of the Governing Board of the National Association for the Education of Young Children.

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"And finally, there is the availability of personnel. You can't imagine that there are a whole lot of people out there with early childhood teaching certificates just waiting for you to call."

Mitchell recommends that states combine available federal, state and local funding and find ways to entice more business participation to provide the necessary funding.

"There is growing awareness of the preponderance of evidence that early childhood education works," she says. "The test for other aspects of education tends to be less rigorous than the test we apply to early childhood. For example, we all agree that we need 5th grade. You don't hear people say, 'I don't think we need 5th grade.' We should take the same view of early childhood education. It could be that the justification for it is that it's good for kids, right now, today. It should not necessarily be based on something that matters later."

Five Trends of Early Childhood Education

The Early Childhood Policy Research update on prekindergarten programs in the U.S. has identified five important trends in the field. They include:

- **Growth** – Only nine states remain with no state-funded prekindergarten program. Not counting children in federal Head Start, nursery schools and other childcare settings, seven states now serve more than 35,000 children each. They are, in order of students served, Texas, Georgia, Illinois, California, New York, Florida and Ohio.

- **Wider service options** – More states are permitting the use of a broader range of early childhood resources under state-funded programs. These include childcare centers, nursery schools, and Head Start programs in addition to the public schools. "When quality early education is the goal, designing pre-K programs to use and improve community early care and education resources, and supporting them to meet the higher standards associated with the concept of prekindergarten, makes sense," the report says. The issue is "how to forge mutually respectful partnerships among community-based early childhood programs and schools so that schools that can contract for services do so."

- **Universal pre-K** – The trend is to serve more children, including three-year-olds, and to impose few or no eligibility requirements.

- **Longer hours** – More programs recognize that half-day programs do not work well for most families. "States are addressing this by extending part day to school day and blending funding through partnerships with programs that already have longer hours," the report says.

- **A commitment to quality** – More states are adopting program standards, accreditation requirements and staff qualifications that include early childhood credentials. Most states with preschool programs also now have preschool standards. "The vast majority of states require that their pre-K program teachers have credentials ranging from a Child Development Associate credential in nine states to a teacher certification – many in early childhood education – in 29 states," the report says.

Many Pathways to a Common Goal

How States Have Addressed the Many Issues of Universal Preschool

CASE STUDY: Georgia
CASE STUDY: New York
CASE STUDY: Oklahoma

Although more than 80% of all states now provide some kind of early childhood education program, comparatively few states provide early childhood services for all age-qualified children, regardless of their at-risk status.

On the following pages, *Little Prints* reports on the response to universal pre-K programs that have been launched in Georgia, New York and Oklahoma. These and other pioneering programs can be important benchmarks for an Illinois voluntary universal preschool initiative.

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Children Win the Georgia State Lottery Jackpot

In a November 1997 editorial, the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution* said, "The words 'innovative' and 'Georgia' aren't usually found in the same sentence, but the state's acclaimed prekindergarten program is changing that. The Prekindergarten Program is often described as (Governor Zell) Miller's 'pet project.' But it may well end up being called his legacy."

Here is how it began and what it has achieved.

A NEW FUNDING SOURCE, A NEW CHILDREN'S DEPARTMENT

During the 1990 gubernatorial election, Governor Miller championed a state lottery, all funds from which would be used to supplement existing educational programs, specifically prekindergarten, college scholarships and technology. In 1992, the Georgia Department of Education operated a successful pilot program serving 750 at-risk four-year-old children and their families, which expanded over the next two years.

With lottery revenue exceeding expectations, Miller in 1995 orchestrated creation of the Office of School Readiness (OSR), separate from the Department of Education, to oversee expansion of the preschool program to serve all four-year-olds, to coordinate the Head Start State Collaboration Office, and to manage related programs.

A VOLUNTARY PUBLIC AND PRIVATE PROGRAM

Today, approximately 63,500 of Georgia's four-year-olds attend 3,223 lottery-funded, full-day prekindergarten classes, at a cost this academic year of $232 million. Enrollment is voluntary, as is school district participation. Licensed private providers that contract directly with the OSR, not the local school systems, operate more than 60% of classes.

"The state of Georgia has 180 school systems, and 151 have prekindergarten programs," says Mark Waits, OSR public relations manager. "Additional providers include for-profit daycare centers, churches (religious programming is not allowed), colleges and universities, hospitals, YMCAs, Head Start and even some army bases. To become a provider, an operator must be licensed and must submit an application detailing credentials, goals and objectives. We inspect the facility, and if it meets our standards and there is a need in that area, it will be funded." Providers, who receive at least one formal evaluation every year along with announced and unannounced review visits, must reapply annually.

In low-population areas, class size may be as low as 10 children. "We try to make sure that if anybody wants to attend, there is a spot for them," says Daphne Haley, interim director of prekindergarten programs.

GUIDELINES ENSURE QUALITY PROGRAMS

Whether classes are in public schools or private facilities, program goals are the same: to provide four-year-olds with the learning experiences they need to prepare for kindergarten. To ensure quality, comprehensive OSR guidelines govern virtually all aspects of operation including services, personnel qualifications and training, community and parent involvement, curriculum, record keeping and reporting and even rest periods and student discipline. No fees may be charged, except for meals.

One goal of the program is to provide early identification of special needs children. The ultimate goal is to include such children within mainstream environments whenever possible. Private providers with special needs children usually use the local school system as a resource but, whenever possible, they keep them within the provider program.

TEACHER REQUIREMENTS AND TRAINING

"The state of Georgia is in a real deficit for teachers," says Haley. "We're raising the bar with the elimination of Child Care Professional or Child Development Associate-only credentials after this year, but we would shoot ourselves in the foot if we required all teachers to be PSC certified." About 3,200 teachers, and another 3,200 teacher aides, are employed in the prekindergarten programs.

Recruiting teachers is the job of the individual providers, not OSR, and private providers recruit in the same way as school districts – at colleges and universities and through advertising.

All teaching staff, whether certified or not, are required to attend OSR-sponsored training in curriculum or specialty training. Best practice training is disseminated through a variety of media including a broadcast to school locations from a prekindergarten classroom via the Georgia Statewide Academic and Medical System.

MEASURING RESULTS

Longitudinal studies for the 1996-97 through 1998-99 school years, conducted by Georgia State University, showed positive results. For example, in the program's second year, a majority of kindergarten teachers believed that prekindergarten attendees were better prepared than non-attendees in seven of eight skill areas, including pre-reading and pre-math skills, fine and gross motor development, independence and initiative, and interacting with adults and other children.

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Georgia's Program Model

Universal prekindergarten established
Began 1992-93 as an at-risk pilot program, expanded 1995-96 to serve all four-year-olds

Eligible children
Georgia residents who are four years old on September 1. Enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Children enrolled 2000-2001
Approximately 63,500 in 151 of 180 school systems, 989 private provider locations licensed by the Office of School Readiness (OSR), and 13,000 children in Head Start. More than 70% of eligible children attend.

Class size
Minimum 18 except in special circumstances such as in low population areas, maximum 20

Teaching staff requirements
One lead teacher, one assistant per class

Teaching staff credentials
Provider payment is based on lead teacher credentials.

1. *Certified* – Georgia Professional Standards Commission (PSC) certificate in Early Childhood, Elementary Education, Early Childhood/Interrelated Special Education or Family and Consumer Sciences or a valid and current out-of-state certification in Early Childhood or Elementary Education
2. *Four-year degree* – PSC teaching certificate in an education field with a P-12 endorsement or a four-year degree in Early Childhood or a related field plus a postsecondary technical institute diploma, associate degree in Early Childhood Care and Education, Montessori diploma or Child Care Professional (CCP) or Child Development Associate (CDA) credential
3. *Technical institute diploma/degree, associate degree or Montessori diploma*
4. *CDA/CCP* – Teachers who have CDA and are not actively involved in obtaining a technical institute diploma/degree, associate degree or Montessori diploma will not be allowed to teach starting with the 2001-2002 school year.

Length of school day/year
6½ hours per day, following the regular school calendar; fee-based extended-day services may be available.

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In November 1997, Georgia's program was recognized as the most comprehensive preschool initiative in the nation, receiving the prestigious Innovations in American Government Award from Harvard University.

ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STORY

In the school district of Muscogee County, on Georgia's western border, the prekindergarten program began with three classrooms serving at-risk children in 1992. In 1993, 12 classes were added, and in 1994 the district had 25 classes. When lottery funding opened free prekindergarten to all children, the district expanded to its current 43 classes serving 860 children in 26 schools. Space and the availability of certified teachers were not an issue.

"I probably interviewed a hundred certified teachers when we expanded from three to 25 classes," says Li Massey, Columbus-based director of early childhood programs. "We worked diligently that summer. We found space in the schools and re-opened an elementary school that had been closed, we hired 13 more resource coordinators to work with families – many of them from the Department of Family and Children's Services – and we equipped 22 more classrooms. The program was well funded."

Expansion from 25 to 43 classrooms went much the same.

"We insisted on certified teachers, and we knew that if we didn't pay them the way our other teachers were paid, on the regular scale, that we would end up creating a revolving door. So we pay a supplement. Many private providers that can't match our salaries or provide our benefits operate without certified teachers."

No expansion plans are in place as the district has reached its space capabilities. And with the private providers in the area, Massey notes, most children are being served.

ONE PRIVATE PROVIDER'S STORY

In 1984, Holley Downs, then pursuing a degree in education, and her husband, who held a business degree, bought a 10,000-square-foot, H-shaped stucco building in Watkinsville, a community of 27,000 in north central Georgia. They revamped and furnished the space, obtained a license, and opened Downs Preschool as an early learning center for infants and preschool children during the day, and as after-school care for children up to age 12. In 1996, they applied for and received a grant and redefined the school as a prekindergarten with seven classrooms, a computer lab and a resource center serving 140 four-year-olds.

"This is something I've always wanted to do – just pre-kindergarten," says Downs. "I wanted to move away from babies and toddlers, and I wanted us to be a school."

Finding certified teachers has not been a problem, Downs notes, even though this year demand was heightened by a state-mandated lower-class-size initiative in public education.

"All our teachers are certified, and we now have two teachers with master's degrees in early childhood education and two more that are working on them," she says. "We've been real fortunate, but if it became a problem, I'm certified and I'd just go into a classroom and teach."

Registration for next year was held on March 31, and classes filled within three hours.

"I think parents just want their children to go to a good quality program, so they're seeking us out," says Downs. "We eat, drink and sleep pre-K, and we have a developmentally appropriate program that is fun and nurturing. We put 150% into what we do every day and we offer an experience that I call the readiness program – for children and their families."

Downs has no immediate plans for pursuing National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) accreditation, due to time constraints, but she has obtained the self-study materials and plans to pursue it eventually.

"I've read the book, and we do everything they ask for and more," she says.

CASE STUDY: New York

New York Goal:

Universal Pre-K by 2002-2003 School Year

... in districts that choose to implement programs

New York State has two prekindergarten programs. The first, launched in 1966 for economically disadvantaged three- and four-year-olds, continues to serve about 19,000 children. It has been so successful that it serves as the model for a second program – universal prekindergarten.

Universal prekindergarten (UP), with a five-year phase-in period, began in the 1998-99 school year with $67 million in grant money. That year, funds were allocated to 68 of 608 school districts, based on a needs-related formula. The program was part of a larger educational reform bill that contained provisions for reduced class size in kindergarten through 3rd grade, full-day kindergarten, and increased technology and capital resources. For the 2000-2001 school year, total funding has reached $225 million.

The goal, says Cynthia Gallagher, coordinator of the state's Office of Early Childhood Programs, is to provide universal access to pre-K programs for all four-year-olds whose parents want it by the 2002-2003 school year, funding permitting.

"We know that a quality pre-K experience brings children into elementary education better prepared to meet New York State Learning Standards," Gallagher says, "and we are looking forward to seeing how children who have attended universal pre-K will perform on New York State's fourth grade English, language arts and mathematics assessments. We anticipate that they will do well."

The UP program is voluntary, but implementation requires community advice and participation. During the year before the prekindergarten program is scheduled to start, a community advisory board convenes to plan for it. The group of parents, teachers, board of education members, members of the early childhood community and community leaders holds at least one formal public hearing on the plan before submitting it to the local board of education for final approval.

The state, in turn, reviews all plans approved by school districts. To qualify, programs must have an educationally based curriculum, promote English literacy, and have in place developmentally

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New York's Program Model

Universal Prekindergarten established
1998-99 school year

Eligible children
New York residents who are four years old by December 1. During the phase-in period, through the 2001-2002 school year, priority must be given to economically disadvantaged children.

Children enrolled 2000-2001
52,490 children (about 19% of all four-year-olds) in 162 of 608 school districts

Class size
No minimum, maximum 20

Teaching staff requirements
Classes of 19 and 20 must have one teacher and two paraprofessionals. Classes of 18 or below must have one teacher and one paraprofessional.

Teaching staff credentials
In public schools, teachers must be certified in early childhood or elementary education and must have a bilingual certificate extension or license where instruction is provided to students with limited English proficiency. In subcontracted private providers, staff must meet the qualifications of the appropriate regulating body until 2001-2002, when they also must be certified.

Length of school day/year
Two configurations that follow the regular school calendar may be used. Half-day programs operate a minimum of 2½ hours per day; full-day programs operate for the same full day as the district's elementary grades.

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continued from **New York** page 9

appropriate practices as defined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children, among other things.

A UP program was implemented by 99 school districts in its second year and by 162 districts in 2000-2001. Next year's numbers are dependent on the legislature, which is expected to vote on program funding levels this spring or possibly as late as summer. The appropriation for prekindergarten programs is expected to rise to $500 million by 2003.

SUBCONTRACTING IS MANDATORY

Under the New York plan, at least 10% of total grant awards to school districts must be used for collaborative efforts with eligible community agencies. Money is allocated on the basis of local requests for proposals that detail the district's needs. Contract agencies can include nursery schools, daycare centers, Head Start programs, special education schools, Catholic schools, yeshivas, other private schools and family childcare homes.

SUBCONTRACTING BLENDS FUNDS AND BENEFITS PROGRAMS

"Contracting with a school district is a win-win situation for school districts that lack space, as well as for providers and parents," says Laurel Fraser, early childhood administrator for New York City. "For private facilities, it provides an additional source of funding that helps them to improve the quality of their programs and provides access to professional development. For parents, it provides more choices of program locations and may mean a reduction in tuition."

Fraser notes that many providers offer full-day programs, ideal for working families; most state prekindergarten classes are half-day classes.

SERVING CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENCY

New York's universal prekindergarten programs must serve children with disabilities. An Individualized Education Plan, which is developed by a team that includes the parents, recommends the educational and related services needed for the child's education and the setting in which they are to be delivered – at home or in a program setting. The team submits the plan to the local school board for approval. The county provides funding for approved programs and services. Just under 60% of the total is reimbursed by the state.

For children of limited English proficiency, state guidelines require that support services be provided in the child's home language and in English.

Although no statewide studies have been funded to assess the three-year-old universal prekindergarten program, Cornell University has begun a study and, Gallagher says, "Response from parents has been hands-down excellent across the state."

Moving Ahead with Universal Pre-K in New York City

Implementation of universal preschool in New York City has been challenging because of shortages of space, teachers and infrastructure. But so far, officials say, the obstacles have been overcome.

Classroom space solutions

In 1998-99, the program's first year, 13,589 children were served. This year the city is serving 38,303 in all 32 of its community school districts and, if the state legislature increases funds, that number will increase substantially next year.

Of the total, 68% of children are served in community organizations, says Laurel Fraser, early childhood education administrator for the city. The proportion is high because the city has also reduced K-3 class sizes, gobbling up public school space. Unlike K-3 classes, pre-K can contract for services.

In most locations, Fraser says, all children who have applied are being served. Some locations have waiting lists, but if state funding increases next year, more than 150 additional private providers have applied for participation and will be evaluated.

"We have a guarantee that the funding level we had last year is secure," says Fraser, "and we're pushing for more."

Certified teacher woes

Class size reduction has also reduced the availability of certified teachers, more and more of whom are needed for kindergarten and early grades. Until next year, outside provider teachers do not require certification, although each facility must have a certified director, and its teachers must be working toward certification.

"The legislation has a provision that says that, effective September 2001, all teachers in the universal prekindergarten program should be certified," says Fraser. "We have appealed to the state and requested a waiver from that provision. If the waiver is not granted, some of our locations will lose their approval, unless we can find enough certified teachers."

Infrastructure improvements are needed

"As you build capacity, you need to make sure that the supports are there to keep the

programs at quality operational levels," says Fraser. "If you expand too rapidly and you don't have a chance to shore up your infrastructure, you face the possibility of not having the high-quality programs you want to have."

For example, the prekindergarten program in each of the community school districts is staffed by an early childhood supervisor, a business manager and staff developers who provide technical assistance on site.

"These same individuals have now taken on responsibility for negotiating contracts, for going out and visiting community based provider sites, for routine monitoring and more," says Fraser. "We have not, within the structure of the universal prekindergarten budget, allocated any specific amounts to increase personnel to support operations and to provide ongoing technical assistance to all the sites. There are some community school districts that have contracted out all their universal prekindergarten sites because they have no space. They may be dealing with 30 or 40 different agencies and sites. Their internal structure needs to be expanded so that the sites receive the level of support they need to live up to the standards and expectations."

CASE STUDY: Oklahoma

Oklahoma's Four-Year-Old Program Spreads Like Wildfire, Hungers for Space

If Oklahoma's preschool program has a problem, it's its overwhelming popularity.

Since 1998, when the legislature approved weighted funding to make prekindergarten free to all four-year-olds, 85% of Oklahoma school districts have started pre-K programs – and demand still exceeds supply.

"At the school where I taught, if sign up started at 4:00 p.m., there were people waiting at 8:00 in the morning," says Margaret West, who now is early childhood coordinator for the state. "That's because parents know what a bonus it is for their kids to have a certified teacher."

The Four-Year-Old Program is voluntary, meaning a district's elected school board can opt to offer half- or full-day classes or not to offer a program at all. Some have only one class and some have many. Space – not the availability of certified teachers – is the biggest issue because half-day kindergarten is state mandated, and many districts are expanding to full-day classes.

PARTNERSHIPS EXPAND PRE-K PROGRAMS

Most prekindergarten classes are housed in public schools, but some are in locations as diverse as assisted living centers, Head Start programs and community childcare facilities that contract with the individual school districts and must adhere to state rules and regulations.

"We're highly encouraging collaboration with Head Start and community providers, but collaboration takes time to implement," says State Superintendent Sandy Garrett.

Ramona Paul, assistant State superintendent, notes that one option that has proved viable is for a certified teacher to go into an existing childcare facility and teach for a half or full day. Since most childcare facilities can't afford a certified teacher, this option immediately upgrades the program quality. Certified teachers also serve as models for non-certified staff members, who receive professional development through the state for participating in the program.

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"I think we'll eventually have a program in every school district," says Paul, "I can probably name 10 districts that are adding prekindergarten programs next fall, and others are expanding. Our goal is to provide developmentally appropriate programs with the highest possible standards to all children who are age four if their parents choose for them to attend."

STATE PROVIDES STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

Curriculum is developed by the school district. All programs must follow standards established by the Department of Education (DOE) for early childhood programs and must offer a learning environment that provides individual and group learning experiences. The DOE also provides extensive program guidelines and a detailed list of developmental learning skills that children should have by the completion of the school year. Accreditation officers monitor programs to ensure that standards are met.

"Our universities train our teachers well and they go out and provide good, quality programs," says Paul. "I don't know of any of our early childhood programs that have been found to be deficient."

PROGRAMS STRIVE FOR INCLUSION OF ALL CHILDREN

Children with special needs are included in the program. Each child has an Individualized Education Plan and a team of teachers, parents and administrators that works together to determine the most appropriate setting for that child, whether it be a mainstream classroom, a special education classroom or another setting.

"We encourage the school districts to, if appropriate, keep children with disabilities in the regular four-year-old classroom," says Paul. "We've found that when they are included in the regular classroom and have other children to model for them, some of those disabilities go away."

Oklahoma's Program Model

Four-year-old program established
1998-99 school year, based on standards set by a 1980 pilot program

Eligible children
Oklahoma residents who are four years old on September 1. Enrollment is on a first-come, first-served basis.

Children enrolled 2000-2001
23,438 children in 463 of 544 school districts

Class size
No minimum, maximum 20

Teaching staff requirements
One teacher per class; classes with more than 10 children must also have an aide.

Teaching staff credentials
Certification in early childhood education

Length of school day/year
School districts may offer 2½-hour half day or 6-hour full day. Programs follow the regular school calendar.

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE POINTS TO SUCCESS

No state funds have been made available for longitudinal studies or measuring success of the programs, but Paul receives plenty of feedback.

"Everybody over the state says this is the most wonderful thing that's happened," she says. "Kindergarten teachers say it is just incredible, that they know immediately when the children walk in the door which ones have been in the four-year-old program and which ones have not. They are so much more ready to do the kind of learning that takes place in kindergarten."

ONE SCHOOL DISTRICT'S STORY

The Norman School District, just south of Oklahoma City, began offering prekindergarten in 1998, with four half-day classes in one school serving 80 children.

"We could have provided prekindergarten earlier, but it would have been tremendously expensive and at our own expense," says Jean Cate, director of curriculum and instruction for the district. "The 1998 legislation made it cost effective to begin to add it."

Today the district has 19 half-day classes in 10 locations – nine public schools and a Head Start location – serving 346 four-year-olds. One more classroom will be added next year, but additional expansion is uncertain due to space constraints.

So far, the prekindergarten program is working very well.

"We did a study after the second year of implementation and found that students who attended the pilot pre-K program outperformed in every category a comparable group that did not attend pre-K," says Cate. "Their social skills and language skills showed the greatest differences, and their pre-mathematics scores were much higher than we would have predicted."

Chicago Public Schools: Moving Toward Universal Preschool

CPS first offered preschool classes in 1965, when Head Start funds became available. Since then, the Office of Language, Cultural and Early Childhood Education (OLCECE) has cobbled together a patchwork of programs that currently serves about 25,000 three- and four-year-old children. Based on findings of longitudinal research (See *August 2000 Study Report*, Page 14), CPS believes that two years of prekindergarten are better than one.

"The concept of universal preschool is something we very much support, but for now, lack of space and funding make it difficult to attain," says Velma Thomas, senior executive assistant to the chief officer of OLCECE. "All of our preschool programs have been grant supported or supported by external funds with low-income, at-risk or other eligibility requirements."

The immediate outlook for significant expansion of state-funded programs is grim, Thomas notes, with only a 4% state budget increase proposed for next year. "Four percent would be eaten up with the cost of living and would provide for only limited expansion, and we are not projecting expansion of our federally funded programs," she says.

Still, with available funds and creative collaboration, OLCECE now has a network of prekindergarten programs at 500 sites. All provide a high quality, developmentally appropriate curriculum taught by an early childhood-certified teacher in classes of no more than 20 students.

CPS prekindergarten includes five key programs that provide a mix of half-day, full-day and extended-day classes.

HEAD START

Head Start began funding prekindergarten programs in 1965 to meet the needs of low-income three- and four-year-olds and their families with health, social, nutrition, mental health and educational services. Today, half-day programs at 47 Chicago sites serve 2,100 children.

CHILD-PARENT CENTERS

In 1968, federally funded full-day Child-Parent Centers (CPC) began serving children age three to five who reside in low-income attendance areas. Children must indicate a need for early education services and have parents who are willing to participate on a regular basis. The centers provide comprehensive services including outreach and health services, require parent participation, and provide classroom activities designed to promote language, reading, social and emotional development.

"Originally the program started children at age three and kept them through age eight, but the children did so well they tested above national norms," says Thomas. "Since the funds were intended for children who are educationally disadvantaged, our primary grades were de-funded, and our CPCs now do not go beyond kindergarten."

The centers are housed in separate facilities or in a wing of an elementary school, and for administrative purposes they are connected to the school. The principal of the school is principal of the center. Currently, 23 centers serve 3,000 children.

STATE PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Approximately 17,000 at-risk children are served in state-funded prekindergarten programs in 304 CPS locations. Most are half-day programs. Class size ranges from 17 to 20, except in school districts where the Chicago Housing Authority is demolishing high-rise apartments and children and families have moved. Other districts have long waiting lists.

STATE PREKINDERGARTEN SUBCONTRACTING PROGRAM

In 1990, as a solution to long pre-K waiting lists and lack of public school space in underserved areas, OLCECE piloted a subcontracting program in seven locations. The full-day program now serves 3,300 children in 179 classrooms in 89 non-public-school locations, largely private childcare centers. Class size ranges from 17 to 20.

Teachers, who are employees of the facility, not CPS, must be certified. Funding comes from a blend of state prekindergarten funds, foundations and other agencies. CPS provides professional development for teachers, and children are considered CPS students, entitled to CPS screenings and all specialized services.

"A facility goes through a proposal process to become a subcontractor," says Christine Ryan, manager of the subcontracting program. "Once a year we invite all of the city's licensed agencies

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– more than 700 of them – to submit proposals. We host an information session to clarify program requirements, guidelines and the proposal process, and interested facilities submit their proposals. I visit all the sites and, based on the proposals and visits, make recommendations to the board."

Ryan expects to add enough facilities to serve 400 more children next year.

NEW THIS SPRING: TUITION-BASED PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAMS

The newest CPS initiative began in February 2001 in 15 locations around the city.

"We have so many parents who want the preschool experience for their children but who do not qualify for any of our programs," says Thomas. "So we looked at schools and communities where there was available space and parents willing to pay tuition for a quality full-day program with a certified teacher."

Classes range from 15 to 20 three- and four-year-old children, depending on classroom size, and teachers are CPS employees. Tuition costs approximately $5,800 for the 48-week program, and payments are made weekly, in advance. Only a handful of families have opted for half-day classes at a cost of $3,000. Centers operate from 7:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., to accommodate working parents. A certified teacher teaches for six hours a day, then childcare, with instructional activities, follows.

"Generally, we have five state pre-K children in each class, to better reflect the community population, but we need tuition-paying parents to support it," says Thomas. "At some sites, tuition-based and state pre-K classes are in the same building. Any extras that are added for the tuition-based program, such as computers or special literature or fine arts programs, are added to the state program so that they do not look different. What's available to one is available to all."

Blaine School's Tuition-Based Pre-K Opens to Rave Reviews

Four-year-old twins Nathan and Trevor Taylor were attending half-day state prekindergarten classes at Blaine, a 108-year-old prekindergarten-through-8th grade school in Chicago's north side Lakeview neighborhood, when their parents' working hours changed and they needed full-day childcare. While researching daycare centers, the Taylors heard about the startup tuition-based program at Blaine and switched programs.

"We were worried that we were going to have to pull the boys out of the state pre-K program to put them in daycare, and the daycare we found that we could afford didn't have educational training," says mom Michelle Taylor. "The tuition-based program is really good because the prekindergarten here knows what the kindergarten's doing and vice versa – they work together. The boys love it, and it's a great learning experience."

Four-year-old Max McCoy's dad, Gary, is equally enthusiastic.

"We had been looking at various programs and found that only the private schools had a structured educational curriculum," he says. "We thought Max was ready for that kind of challenge, but private schools are expensive. Blaine is much more affordable, and we love that he's in a small, controlled setting with only 20 kids, a teacher and two assistants, and at the same time he's in a big school where he'll continue through 8th grade."

An amazingly easy startup

Blaine School already had three state prekindergarten classes and two prekindergarten special education classes when its tuition-based class opened on February 13, 2001.

"Our parents had been asking for strong preschool instruction and childcare also," says Blaine School Principal Gladys Vacarreza. "So we moved a science lab upstairs and converted and furnished a first-floor classroom."

On registration day, the class filled quickly, and 20 children are on a waiting list.

A stroke of good luck provided a teacher. In January, a December graduate with early childhood certification happened to be visiting a friend at the school and was introduced to Vacarreza, who offered her the position on the spot.

"And the teacher is bilingual!" Vacarreza adds with enthusiasm. "This is wonderful because we want to introduce Spanish as a second language in prekindergarten."

The Blaine prekindergarten classes are part of the Lakeview Education and Arts Program, which integrates arts across the curriculum and offers music, fine arts, dance and storytelling. "We have two computers in each classroom plus a computer lab, and these things are available to all the prekindergarten children," says Vacarreza. "The tuition-based program is not a separate program, it's another program."

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Longitudinal Study Says Preschool

Cuts Crime and Dropout Rates, Boosts Academic Achievement

The subject of preschool doesn't often find its way into the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, but it did on May 9, 2001, when new data from the ongoing Chicago Longitudinal Study showed significantly lower juvenile crime and dropout rates among low-income children who attended prekindergarten programs at Child-Parent Centers (CPC) operated by the Chicago Public Schools.

The JAMA report provided additional confirmation of the benefits of early childhood education and followed the study's August 2000 findings, which detailed significant, positive effects of the programs on academic achievement.

Since 1986, the federally funded study has followed two groups of inner-city children born in 1980, nearly all of whom are African-American, including about 900 who attended CPC half-day prekindergarten classes for one or two years and 500 who did not. Participants are now 21 years old.

The study's principal investigators, Arthur J. Reynolds, an associate professor of social work at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, and Judy A. Temple, an associate professor of economics at Northern Illinois University, say the new data show that high-quality early intervention creates cumulative advantages that persist into early adulthood.

"We haven't had this level of long-term scientific evidence for public [preschool] programs until now," says Reynolds. "These are really life-altering outcomes for young people with major implications for society."

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KEY 2001 STUDY RESULTS

The 2001 report analyzed data related to arrest, grade-retention, special education and high-school completion. Key findings:

- Juvenile arrest rates were 33% lower for the preschool group at 16.9%, compared with 25.1% for the non-preschool group. The national rate of arrest is about 12% for 10- to 17-year-olds.
- Violent arrest rates were 41% lower for the preschool group at 9%, compared with 15.3% for the comparison group.
- The rate of grade retention was 40% less for the preschool group than the comparison group, or 22% vs. 38.4%.
- The number of children requiring special education placement by age 18 was significantly lower for the preschool group at 14.4%, compared with 24.6% for the comparison group.
- By age 20, the preschool group's high school completion rate was 29% higher than the comparison group at 49.7%, compared with 38.5%.
- Preschool participation benefited boys more than girls – a significant finding since African-American males are at the highest risk of school failure. Preschool boys had a 47% higher rate of high school completion than comparison group boys.

KEY 2000 STUDY RESULTS

Data reported in 2000 focused on the effects of the CPC programs on school readiness and later academic achievement.

Short-term effects, ages 5-13 – Children who attended preschool significantly outperformed the comparison group.

- Preschool had the greatest effect on cognitive readiness at school entry, with CPC children gaining approximately three months in performance.
- Meaningful differences were found in reading and math achievement in grades 4-6, but through grade 6, the largest differences were in special education placement and reduced grade retention. By the end of third grade, only 7.1% of the preschool children received special education services, compared with 11.5% of the comparison children. Preschool children were retained less often and had lower rates of special education placement through age 13. Their parents also remained more involved in their child's schooling.
- By age 13, children who participated in CPC programs for four to six years (the original programs included children through grade 3) were retained in grade only half as often as children who participated for two to three years of preschool plus kindergarten only (15.5% vs. 30.1%).
- By age 13, children in the extended-program group required less special education placement than children in the two-to-three-year group (10% vs. 15.7%).

Long-term effects, ages 14-20 – CPC program participation continued to impact academic achievement and development through age 20.

- At age 15, preschool participants had approximately a four-month gain in reading and math achievement and were less likely than non-participants to have been retained by 9th grade (24% vs. 35%).
- The longer the program participation, the greater were all academic measures at ages 14 and 15. Five or six years yielded the best performance, with the six-year group above the Chicago Public School average in reading achievement and below the national average for grade retention.
- Children who attended programs in the highest poverty neighborhoods benefited more in school achievement than children in lower-poverty neighborhoods.

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PRESCHOOL *NOW* CAN REDUCE PUBLIC SPENDING LATER

The study results have major economic implications, researchers say, given the high cost of special education and grade retention. They estimate that every dollar invested in high-quality preschool programs such as the CPC programs, which they describe as having a "nurturing, positive atmosphere with well-trained, experienced teachers," could save schools and society about $4 by reducing public spending on remedial and corrective programs.

IMPLICATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL PREKINDERGARTEN?

Reynolds and Temple support the concept of universal preschool.

"Our research provides convincing evidence that the early investment in children who are at risk for failure can yield positive benefits to society," says Temple. "I support the concept of universal prekindergarten because it gives everyone access to preschool. But as an economist, my concern is that an attempt to make these services universally available can end up watering down the quality of services that everyone receives."

Temple believes that for universal prekindergarten programs to be successful, states need to put more money into better pay for qualified teachers.

Reynolds says that earlier study findings, especially on literacy and academic achievement benefits of preschool attendance, "may be generalizable" to all children.

"These findings are supported by other studies that looked at much broader samples," says Reynolds. "High-quality programs will provide all kids a literacy advantage, but they may have the most effect with kids of low-income parents."

His recommendation for implementing universal preschool is the approach that some states are already taking: Have the same overall concept statewide, with local flexibility regarding details such as full-day or half-day programs and ancillary services provided.

THE STUDY CONTINUES

The next step for Chicago Longitudinal Study is to track participant experiences at least until the subjects are 25 years old. Focus will be on college enrollment and completion rates, employment and income, participation in public aid programs, crime, quality of life, well-being and plans for the future.

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